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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006099

SIPDIS

NOFORN

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TAGS: PREL IZ TU

SUBJECT: (S) IRAQ: TURKEY ENCOURAGES SUNNI PARTICIPATION,  
MEETS WITH SADRISTS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANICE WEINER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

11. (U) This is an action request. See para 5.

Summary

12. (S/NF) MFA Director General for the Middle East and South Asia Oguz Celikkol briefed us October 7 on recent GOT contacts with Iraqi Sunni representatives as well as two envoys from Muqtada al-Sadr. Celikkol said the GOT urged the Sunnis to participate in the political process and not repeat their past mistakes. The al-Sadr representatives asked if they could open an office in Ankara to improve contacts with the GOT. They reportedly told the MFA they are willing to participate in the political process, share common ground with the Sunnis on the importance of Iraqi unity, support Iraq's Arab identity, fear that the Kurds are overrunning Kirkuk, and fear Iranian penetration in Iraq. Celikkol expressed interest in U.S. perceptions of the Sadrists and explicitly requested our assessment of their political reach and intentions. End Summary.

Turks to Sunnis: Don't Make Same Mistake Twice

13. (C/Rel MCF-I) Celikkol told Polloff and PolMiloff that, in meetings the last week of September with visiting Sunni leaders Tariq al Hashemi (Iraqi Islamic Party) and Salih Mutlaq (National Dialogue Council) in Ankara, the MFA strongly encouraged Sunni participation in the constitutional referendum and December elections. The Sunnis were told the GOT would have little sympathy for them if they "repeated their mistake," of not participating in the political process. In a separate discussion, MFA Iraq Director Avni Botsali told Polloff the Sunnis heard the message but reiterated their concerns about constitutional provisions on the use of Arabic and the indivisibility of the Iraqi state. Botsali added the GOT is also encouraging the Kurds at every opportunity to maintain contact with the Sunnis, especially during the process of developing implementing legislation once the constitution is approved.

Turks Meet Visiting al-Sadr Reps

14. (S/NF) Celikkol said the MFA had met recently with Muqtada al-Sadr representatives Sheikh Saad al-Jabr (name as heard), a political advisor to al-Sadr, and Sheikh Fadel abu-Zayed al-Dakel, head of the Sharia court. The al-Sadr representatives asked about the possibility of opening an office in Turkey to improve contacts with the Turkish government. (Note: The PUK, KDP, SCIRI, and the Iraqi Turkmen Front all have offices in Ankara. End note.) Celikkol said the MFA is considering this request "in a positive light." Celikkol said that, in discussions with him and GOT Special Envoy for Iraq Koruturk, the two al-Sadr representatives came across as "intelligent and moderate," which pleasantly surprised the Turkish side. The two appeared well-informed and stressed that al-Sadr supporters want to participate in the political process despite enduring misgivings about the current draft constitution. According to Celikkol, they are concerned about growing Iranian influence and suggested they are willing to work with the Sunnis to counter this. In general, they took an "Arab nationalist" approach, fearing the fracture of Iraq and sharing many ideas in common with the Sunnis. In that regard, they look at the Badr group with skepticism, regarding them as a foreign force in Iraq. Celikkol further reported the representatives stressed Kirkuk belongs to the whole nation. They claimed al-Sadr has the allegiance of 70-80 percent of Iraq's Shiites. (Comment: The Turks shared our skepticism on the last point. End Comment.)

15. (S/NF) Action Request: Celikkol asked if the U.S. and Turkey could share, on a confidential basis, our respective views on al-Sadr and assessments of the group's influence and intentions in Iraq. Emboffs promised to look into what we could share in that area. Celikkol seemed to prefer we share notes in Ankara but Washington or Baghdad would seem more logical to us. He asked that we keep secret the fact that he discussed his meeting with the Sadrists with us.

16. (S/NF) Comment: The Turks seemed impressed and intrigued by the al-Sadr envoys, who appeared willing to be constructive in Iraq and who appeared to share deeply-held GOT concerns regarding the potential for Iraq's fracture and growing Iranian influence. End comment.  
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